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C O N F I D E N T I A L BRATISLAVA 000580

SIPDIS

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SUBJECT: FICO CALLS SLOVAKIA "ISLAND OF AMERICAN INFLUENCE"

CLASSIFIED BY: AMBASSADOR WEISER FOR REASON 1.4 (B)

1. (C) SUMMARY: ROBERT FICO, LEADER OF OPPOSITION PARTY SMER, RESPONDED TO THE JUNE 8 DEATHS OF THREE SLOVAK SOLDIERS IN IRAQ AND THE PASSAGE OF THE UNSC RESOLUTION ON IRAQ BY LAMBASTING THE DZURINDA GOVERNMENT'S FOREIGN POLICY, PARTICULARLY ITS CLOSE TIES TO THE U.S. FELLOW SMER MP ROBERT KALINAK TOLD POLOFFS THAT SMER PLANNED TO BE VERY CRITICAL OF DZURINDA'S POLICIES IN THE COMING WEEK. HE ALSO SAID FICO HAD RETURNED FROM WASHINGTON WITH THE MESSAGE THAT SMER COULD BE CRITICAL OF U.S. POLICY AS LONG AS IT DIDN'T ASK FOR THE RECALL FROM IRAQ OF SLOVAK TROOPS. FICO'S MESSAGE WAS SURELY DESIGNED IN PART TO WIN SUPPORT FOR SMER'S CANDIDATES IN JUNE 13 EUROPEAN PARLIAMENT ELECTIONS. END SUMMARY.

2. (U) IN A JUNE 9 PRESS CONFERENCE, SMER'S ROBERT FICO ACCUSED THE GOVERNMENT OF MAKING SLOVAKIA INTO AN "ISLAND OF AMERICAN INFLUENCE" IN CENTRAL EUROPE, EVADING INTERNATIONAL LAW AND PARTICIPATING IN EXPERIMENTS OF THE BUSH ADMINISTRATION, SUCH AS THE MILITARY INTERVENTION IN IRAQ. HE CALLED ON THE GOVERNMENT TO PROVIDE OBJECTIVE INFORMATION TO THE PARLIAMENT ON WHAT SLOVAK SOLDIERS ARE DOING IN IRAQ AND WHAT THE SITUATION IS IN THE COUNTRY. ACCORDING TO FICO IT IS NECESSARY FOR PARLIAMENT TO DISCUSS THE GOVERNMENT'S FOREIGN AND SECURITY POLICY.

3. (U) FICO CRITICIZED PRIME MINISTER MIKULAS DZURINDA AND HIS SLOVAK DEMOCRATIC AND CHRISTIAN UNION (SDKU). HE SAID HE CONSIDERS SDKU'S POLICY AS PRO-AMERICAN DESPITE DECLARATIONS OF GOOD RELATIONS WITH THE EUROPEAN UNION. HE EXPRESSED DOUBT THAT SDKU DEPUTIES ELECTED TO THE EUROPEAN PARLIAMENT WOULD ADVOCATE EUROPEAN INTERESTS. HE PROMISED THAT SMER AND ITS DEPUTIES WOULD ALWAYS SUPPORT THE FOREIGN AND SECURITY POLICY OF THE EUROPEAN UNION AS WELL AS A CLOSER ORIENTATION TO GERMANY AND FRANCE.

4. (U) FICO SAID SMER IS STILL ANALYZING THE NEW UNSC RESOLUTION ON IRAQ. HOWEVER, HE ADDED, NOTHING WILL CHANGE IN THE LIFE OF THE IRAQIS AND THE UN WILL HAVE NO INFLUENCE ON THE SITUATION, WITH THE SPECTER OF A CIVIL WAR HANGING OVER THE COUNTRY. IN THE JUNE 9 PRESS CONFERENCE, HE ADMITTED THAT THE RESOLUTION COULD GIVE A MANDATE TO THE SLOVAK SOLDIERS, HOWEVER HE DOUBTED WHETHER THEY ARE IN IRAQ FOR A JUSTIFIED CAUSE. IN A JUNE 13 TELEVISED DEBATE, FICO SAID THE UNSC RESOLUTION DOES NOT ENTITLE SLOVAK TROOPS TO STAY IN IRAQ. VICE-CHAIRMAN OF SMER ROBERT KALINAK COMMENTED PUBLICLY THAT THE MISSION OF SLOVAK TROOPS HAS NO DEEPER SENSE. ALTHOUGH THEY ARE MINE DISPOSAL SPECIALISTS, SO FAR THEY HAVE STAYED IN THEIR CAMP AND THROUGHOUT THEIR DEPLOYMENT IN IRAQ THEY HAVE UNNECESSARILY EXPOSED THEMSELVES TO DANGER. KALINAK TOLD POLOFFS JUNE 10 THAT SMER WOULD NOT ASK FOR THE RECALL OF SLOVAK TROOPS. NOR DID HE BELIEVE THE DISCUSSION IN PARLIAMENT WOULD HAVE ANY IMPACT ON POLICY DECISIONS OF THE SLOVAK GOVERNMENT. WHEN WE ASKED ABOUT THE PUBLIC IMPACT OF SUCH A DEBATE, KALINAK CLAIMED THAT 80 PERCENT OF THE PUBLIC WAS AGAINST SENDING TROOPS TO IRAQ OR ANYWHERE ELSE.

COMMENT

5. (C) FICO TOLD THE AMBASSADOR ON PREVIOUS OCCASIONS THAT ONCE A UNSC RESOLUTION ON IRAQ WAS PASSED, HE WOULD NO LONGER BE OPPOSED TO SLOVAK TROOPS THERE. HIS PUBLIC STATEMENTS DO NOT CALL FOR WITHDRAWAL OF TROOPS, ONLY DISCUSSION OF THEIR MANDATE. KALINAK EXPLAINED TO POLOFFS THAT FICO GOT THE MESSAGE DURING HIS RECENT VISIT TO WASHINGTON: THE U.S. DID NOT MIND SMER BEING CRITICAL OF VARIOUS ISSUES, INCLUDING THE U.S. AND IRAQ, BUT FICO IS AWARE THAT HE SHOULD NOT ASK FOR THE RECALL OF TROOPS.

6. (C) PM DZURINDA AND THE AMBASSADOR DISCUSSED FICO'S REMARKS WHEN DZURINDA CAME TO THE EMBASSY JUNE 10 TO SIGN THE CONDOLENCE BOOK FOR RONALD REAGAN (SEPTEL). DZURINDA LAMENTED THE STATEMENTS, PARTICULARLY THE CRITICISM THAT SLOVAKIA WAS AN ISLAND OF AMERICAN INFLUENCE. DZURINDA TOLD THE AMBASSADOR THAT HE WAS VERY PLEASED AT THE PASSAGE OF THE UNSC RESOLUTION, AND CONSIDERED IT A CREDIT TO PRESIDENT BUSH.  
WEISER

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